

**Report of the University Ombudsperson to the Governing Council  
For the period July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

This annual report covers the period from July 1, 2003, to June 30, 2004. The report provides a statistical summary of the caseload for the year as well as comparisons with the previous four years, updates issues discussed in previous reports and highlights specific cases and issues from this year that warrant attention or comment.

The Terms of Reference of the University Ombudsperson, 2001 (Appendix A), give the Ombudsperson the responsibility to investigate, in an impartial fashion, complaints made by students or members of the teaching or administrative staff against the University or against anyone in the University exercising authority, and to bring to the University's attention any gaps and inadequacies in existing policies and procedures.

The University provides the operating budget for the Office, and the Ombudsperson reports directly to the Governing Council. Because the Office offers complete confidentiality, operates from an impartial and independent perspective, and is accessible to all members of the University community, the Ombudsperson is uniquely positioned to call attention to patterns of problems that might be developing across and/or within divisions, and to seek, whenever possible, early resolution to issues and concerns on an informal basis.

The Terms of Reference require that the Office "make an annual report to the University community through the Governing Council." This mandate is evidence of the University's resolve to address shortfalls in policies and procedures. For a number of years, the Governing Council has required a formal administrative response to the annual report of the Ombudsperson, thus promoting openness and accountability in dealing with issues and in taking a collective responsibility for their resolution.

**II. OFFICE OPERATIONS AND RESOURCES**

**1. Mid-Term Review of the Office of the University Ombudsperson**

The Governing Council is responsible for undertaking reviews of the Office of the Ombudsperson coincidental to the end of the Ombudsperson's term of office as well as to the middle of the incumbent's term, in a manner to be determined by the Executive Committee of Governing Council. The Executive Committee struck a "Special Committee" to conduct its mid-term review in early 2004. The Special Committee's mandate was to "examine the degree to which the recommendations of the *Report of the Committee on the Office of the Ombudsperson* (April 2001) had been implemented... and, if necessary, to formulate new recommendations to ensure that the effectiveness of the Office's operations is maintained or increased."

Having received submissions from a variety of campus community members, the Special Committee stated, in its May 2004 report to the Executive Committee, that “the University continues to be well-served by the Office of the Ombudsperson,” and that “there was general satisfaction with the fairness and impartiality of the Ombudsperson in handling cases.” However, the Committee also noted that student groups had expressed concern that the general level of awareness about the Office was too low. This continues to be a very important concern for us as well, and one that I address in further detail in a later section of this report (see section II.1(c) below - “Tri-Campus Scheduling and Outreach”).

While it was the Special Committee’s overall conclusion that we had successfully implemented the 2001 review report’s recommendations, the committee members drew attention to the two following recommendations from that report for further discussion.

**(a) Consultation Network**

With respect to the 2001 report’s recommendation that an Advisory Committee be established by the Ombudsperson, the Special Committee endorsed my subsequent implementation of an ad hoc consultation network, and recommended that it continue to be “the *modus operandi* of the Office.” As I did the previous year, I have consulted from time to time throughout this past year, with fifty University community members across the three campuses with respect to individual cases, concerns about possible emerging trends or patterns, and/or office operations and caseload management issues.

**(b) Capacity-Planning Model for Resource Allocation**

Another of the 2001 review report’s recommendations was that the University should develop a “capacity-planning model” designed “to identify the extent to which resources may need to be adjusted in response to changing demand for services.” Within this context, the Special Committee, in its May 2004 report, made note of my comment during my interview with them that “the level of support provided to my office – one-half support staff member – was insufficient for proper planning and functioning of Office operations.” It was the Special Committee’s conclusion that:

“... there is no standard number of cases that would go to the Ombudsperson. The number of actual cases could fluctuate given numerous variables, whether they are the conduct of individual members of the administration, the determination of those seeking remedies, the nature of potential complaints, or any number of other variables. Furthermore, there was no way to determine how many cases should proceed to the Ombudsperson but do not because of lack of knowledge of the Office’s services. Nonetheless, the Review Committee did note that for the current level of caseload within the Office, resources were adequate. If the number of cases were to grow on a sustained basis, the Review Committee would advise that budgetary processes take those data strongly into account when determining the resources dedicated to the Ombudsperson function.”

With respect to the limited support-staff issue, the Committee put forward other “options to explore for the more effective use of the Office,” such as enhancing the web-based intake form so that individuals could send their completed information forms directly to the Office from the website, and requesting that they do so before appointments are arranged. In the Committee’s view, not only would this serve to reduce the number of “drop-in” visitors (something the Office should be striving to do in any case, according to the committee, since it is not an “emergency-response resource”), but it would also serve to reduce visits by individuals with issues that did not fall within the jurisdiction of the Office, as well as by those better served by referral to other campus resources. We have now improved our web-based “Request for Assistance” form, as suggested by the Special Committee.

### **(c) Tri-Campus Scheduling and Outreach**

Another of the Special Committee’s suggestions that we are following involves the reduction of my regularly scheduled visits to the east and west campuses (one-half day per week at each campus), in favour of visits by individual appointment, when required.

In terms of our communication materials and outreach, we believe that we are being careful, as the Special Committee suggested, to maintain a “balance between informing potential clients of the Office’s services rather than ‘advertising’ for them.” Print materials such as bookmarks, posters and brochures are frequently used as resources by academic ombudspersons, based on their cost effectiveness, ease of distribution and efficiency in providing succinct information to the community about the existence, role and function of the ombudsperson’s office. The year before last, we distributed a total of 10,000 bookmarks and 400 posters across the three campuses. Last year, we distributed 7000 bookmarks and 200 posters. This year, we have distributed 600 bookmarks and 30 posters, to date. In addition, our web site provides an easily accessible and effective resource for community members who wish to obtain information about our office, and/or to set up appointments by completing and returning our on-line “Request for Assistance” form.

## **III. CASELOAD AND CASE MANAGEMENT**

### **1. Total Caseload**

We handled 367 complaints and queries from July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004, a 13% increase over the previous year (Appendix B: “Number of Cases by Year”). This represents the highest number of complaints and queries brought to the attention of the Office of the Ombudsperson in the last seven years.

### **2. Total Student Caseload**

We experienced an 18% increase in our undergraduate/professional faculty student and graduate student caseload in comparison with last year (Appendix C: “Analysis of

Caseload by Constituency”). This outpaces significantly the University’s 8.5% growth in undergraduate and graduate student enrolment.

I focus more specifically on the nature of my Office’s caseload expansion in a number of the following sections of this report, including III.3 “Profile of the Office at UTM and UTSC”, III.5 “Increased Focus of the Office on More Complex Cases”, and section IV “Issues and Interventions”.

### **3. Profile of the Office at UTM and UTSC**

My caseload for the University of Toronto at Mississauga (UTM) and the University of Toronto at Scarborough (UTSC) increased by 5%, to a total of 62 complaints and queries (see Appendix D: “Accessibility Measures”). This represents a combination of 38 cases at UTM (an increase of 15%) and 24 at UTSC (a decrease of 8%), in comparison with last year’s 33 cases at UTM and 26 complaints and queries at UTSC.

If we examine a few other indicators, then we may conclude that this growth in caseload from UTM was within the range expected, given that campus’ enrolment increase. UTM’s 38 cases represented .4% of its student population. Similarly, my overall student caseload represented .4% of the total University student population. UTM’s student population represented 13% of the University’s student population, and complaints and queries from UTM represented 14% of my total student caseload. UTM experienced a 16% growth in enrolment over the previous year and, as I noted above, complaints and queries to my Office from UTM students increased by 15% over the same time period.

Within a similar context, my UTSC caseload was significantly lower than expected. That campus’ 24 cases (.3% of the UTSC student population) represented 8% of my overall student caseload, while the UTSC student population represented 12% of U of T’s total student population. Also, this caseload decline from last year’s 26 cases contrasts with UTSC’s enrolment expansion of 19%, and I note as well that visits to my Office’s website from UTSC community members decreased by one-third from the previous year.

### **4. Website Contact Frequency**

In the context of my Office’s communication and outreach profiles, I would draw attention to the decline in visits to our website (down to 218 visits from 280, a 23% decrease) from the east and west campuses’ community members. In comparison, the overall frequency of University community members’ visits to my website remained fairly stable over the past two years (1400 visits this year and 1423 last year). Given my reduced office hours at UTM and UTSC in accordance with the Special Committee’s suggestion, it becomes increasingly important to monitor the accessibility of my Office’s services to those community members. We will be actively searching for ways of enhancing access to our web site through linkages from other university web sites across all three campuses.

## **5. Increased Focus of the Office on More Complex Cases**

The majority of cases remain those categorized as “Information/Referral”, totalling 201 cases or 55% of our caseload (see Appendix E: “Analysis of Caseload by Action Taken & Staff Resources”). As I pointed out in my report last year, many “information” cases require a significant investment of time on our part because the issues involved are complicated and/or ongoing. While in other “information” situations, our involvement is directed at identifying options and providing suggestions, from an impartial perspective, to help facilitate our visitors’ resolution of their own issues and often at earlier points in the process prior to more formal and lengthy complaint resolution avenues.

In the early-to-mid nineties, according to the Office’s statistical history, the “information/referral” category of interaction remained in the 70/80% range of our caseload. Since the late nineties, this range has varied from a high of 63% in 1998-99 to a low of 46% of our caseload in 2001-02. This is one indication of our successful communication of information to the University community about the role and function of the Ombudsperson’s Office, and of increasingly successful triaging of students’ issues and concerns to other campus resources, whenever appropriate. This has been accomplished through our website introduced in 1999, and through the distribution of our bookmarks and posters starting in 2000. These initiatives were designed to increase awareness of the existence of the Office as well as to emphasize our focus on those situations in which we represent the final avenue of recourse.

Another measure within this context, is the increase in cases categorized as “expedited” and “resolved” over the past several years. In the early-to-mid-nineties, these categories (combined) tended to be in the range of 10/12% of the caseload, compared with the more recent 19%-24% of our caseload. I note also that in the majority of these cases, the outcome could be described as favourable to the visitor to my Office. I provide additional information related to individual case resolution, including issues and interventions in the following section of this report.

## **IV. ISSUES AND INTERVENTIONS**

### **1. Undergraduate/Professional Faculty Student Case Management**

Last year, 203 individual/groups of undergraduate students approached my Office for assistance (Appendix C: “Analysis of Caseload by Constituency”). While this represents less than 1% (.4%) of the University’s total undergraduate population, it is the highest number of undergraduates to have approached my Office with complaints and queries in the past seven years, and represents a 13% increase over the previous year. I note that the University’s undergraduate enrolment expansion amounted to a 9.8% increase from the previous year.

Appendix F (Table 1: “Student Caseload by Issue” and Table 2: “Caseload by Assistance Provided”) provides additional information related to these students’ issues and to the nature of my Office’s involvement. The following sections of this report include more

detailed discussion of this statistical information, including comparative analysis of the issues raised by students over the past two years.

Once again this year, the issues most frequently raised by undergraduate/professional faculty students related to “Policy Interpretation/Advice”, “Academic Concerns (eg. Classes/Teaching)”, “Administrative Policy/Procedure (eg. Access/Bureaucracy Issues)”, “Academic Policy/Procedure (eg. Petition Denials)” and “Grading Dispute/Concern”.

There was a notable decline in cases from the previous year for only two issues: “Interpersonal Dispute” (2 cases from 7 last year) and “Admissions” (4 cases from 10 last year). For three other issues (“Academic Policy/Procedure”, “Library Issues” and “Employment/Workplace Dispute”), the numbers remained at similar levels. The following eight issues increased in frequency from the previous year: “Policy Interpretation/Advice” (88 cases compared with last year’s 52), “Academic Concerns” (71/60), “Administrative Policy/Procedure” (45/37), “Grading Dispute/Concern” (34/24), “Fees/Financial Aid” (25/19), “Accused of Policy/Legal Violation (Codes)” (24/15), “Concern re: Harassment or Discrimination” (17/13), and “Residence/Housing” (14/7).

The complexity of the undergraduate student caseload seems to have increased significantly from the previous year. We note that 62% (126) of the undergraduate students raised more than one issue when they approached us for assistance, compared with 55% (98) the previous year, and 22% (45) raised three or more issues, compared with 9% (16) of the undergraduate students the previous year. The assistance we provided to 48 (24%) of the undergraduate students involved three or more “Types of Intervention.” This assistance most frequently reflected a combination of “Individual Consultation” (often involving more than one meeting per individual depending on the complexity of the issues and/or their ongoing nature), together with “Ombuds Contacted Persons/Offices” and “Information/Referral” (the latter often related to policy interpretation/advice).

As I mentioned above, we experienced a significant increase in the issue categorized as policy interpretation/advice (88/44% of the caseload, compared with 52/29% the previous year). This reflects my ongoing role in ensuring that visitors to the Office of the Ombudsperson are aware of relevant university policy/process, and in considering fair implementation as it applies to their situations. Over the past three years, I have noticed that visitors seem increasingly aware of the relevant policy/regulations pertaining to their concerns at the time they approach us for assistance. This most likely relates to a combination of the following factors: the administration’s increased communication of this information through website and print resources; increased referrals to our Office amongst community members, and more visitors approaching us after having researched their own concerns and/or having discussed them with the appropriate university representatives such as registrars, academic and financial aid counselors, student affairs and student services personnel, equity officers and/or undergraduate coordinators, et cetera. These better-informed complainants generally present the most complex concerns and situations when they approach us for assistance, frequently involving a combination of the following: more than two issues; more detailed exploration of the fairness aspects

of policy/protocol implementation; fact-finding through contact with multiple university representatives; informal mediation/facilitation, and ongoing involvement sometimes over a period of several weeks.

## **2. Undergraduate Student Case Resolution**

As I stated earlier in this report (section III.5 – “Increased Focus of the Office on More Complex Cases”), the combination of “expedited” and “resolved” case resolution categories has increased to its more recent levels of 19%-24% of our total caseload, compared with its early-to-mid-nineties levels of 10%-12%. Within this context, for example, 39 (19%) of the undergraduate/professional faculty student queries and concerns brought to my attention last year were categorized as resolved. In 79% (31 cases) of these cases, I would categorize the outcome as favourable to the students. While the Office’s mandate of ensuring the confidentiality of our visitors precludes detailed discussion of cases for the purposes of this report, I offer a number of case resolution summaries in the following three paragraphs.

A Commerce student who had participated in the University’s Professional Experience Year Program (PEY) approached my office with a complaint about the significant increase in his fees resulting from having taken that year off from his studies. This had, in effect, lengthened his program completion time beyond the expected four-year timeframe, with the result that he was no longer subject to the University’s policy guarantee of a limit to 5% in fee increases for the ‘normal’ length of study i.e. four years. After I discussed this issue with representatives of the Office of the Vice-Provost, Planning and Budget, it was their conclusion that students who take the University’s PEY Program option, since their normally expected time to completion is lengthened to five years, should therefore experience the University’s fee increase protection for five years. The outcome of my Office’s involvement was that a total of 48 Commerce and Computer Science students (1999-00 cohort) who had participated in the PEY program the previous year were assessed close to \$2000 less each in tuition fees.

In two cases brought to my attention by undergraduate students, I had concerns about lack of timeliness on the part of the administration in the implementation of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. After I discussed these concerns with faculty and departmental representatives, it was their decision to discontinue the Code process in view of the two-year timeframe that had already passed. These two students thus became eligible for graduation given the removal of the GWR (Grade withheld pending Review) notations on their transcripts.

There were three other cases in which I facilitated, with the collaboration of the administration, the students’ convocation earlier than otherwise would have been possible. In one case, for example, the student was experiencing transfer credit issues due, in part, to longstanding delay on the part of the institution she had previously attended. With significant effort on the part of her College registrarial staff, together with my involvement, this student was able to participate in convocation ceremonies with her classmates two days later.

Other cases in which I facilitated a successful outcome, with the collaboration of the administration, included issues of academic appeals, petitions for special consideration, access to core courses, late submission and evaluation dates for term assignments, the nature and evaluation of student group assignments and fees/financial aid.

### **3. Recommendations Arising from Undergraduate Student Caseload**

In my annual report last year, I listed a number of initiatives introduced by the University administration within the previous five years serving to address and/ameliorate issues included in my annual reports over that same timeframe (Appendix G: “University’s Policy/Procedural/Administrative Initiatives that Address the University Ombudsperson’s Recommendations”). In my report this year, I am bringing forward for the attention of the University community those recommendations from my previous annual reports that, in my view, have not been adequately addressed by the administration in accordance with their “Administration Response” documents tabled with the Governing Council at the same time as my annual reports.

#### **(a) *Guidelines for Academic Appeals Within Divisions and Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters:***

Over the past six years, appeals processes have represented the topics about which students most frequently approached my Office for advice and/or assistance. Last year, for example, “Academic Policy/Procedure” issues arose in 17% of my caseload, and “Grading Disputes/Concerns” in 16%. In another 10% of my caseload, the University’s *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* was the topic of students’ complaints or concerns.

In four of my five previous annual reports, I have written about timeliness and/or process concerns, such as campus-wide consistency of application, related to implementation of the University’s academic appeals and academic misconduct policies. In the past five years, the administration has advised that it has introduced the following initiatives related to my concerns: the provision of support materials, workshops and training sessions for departmental and divisional representatives on the administration of the Code and the academic appeals process; a divisional review and analysis of administrative resources for those who are charged with the administration of the academic appeals and Code processes; the appointment of the Judicial Affairs Officer, and publication on-line of information brochures for students entitled “Academic Honesty” and “Your Grades”.

While many of my concerns related to implementation of the Code and the academic appeals process have indeed been addressed by these various administrative initiatives, substantive reviews of the 1977 *Guidelines for Academic Appeals Within Divisions* and the 1995 *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* have not been carried out. The Administration Response of 2001-02 stated the following with respect to the academic appeals policy: “The Vice-Provost, Faculty, and legal counsel will work with the Judicial Affairs Officer to determine whether a formal review of the Guidelines will be required.



We are also planning workshops and the preparation of support materials for Divisions to ensure consistency in administration of procedures.” With respect to the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*, the Administration Response stated the following: “The Vice-Provost, Faculty, and legal counsel will work with the Judicial Affairs Officer to determine the timing of a review of the Code and to propose a process. While the Administration is hopeful it can get to this task in this academic year, there are many competing priorities.”

**Recommendation 1: That, for the purposes of its Administration Response to this year’s Annual Report, the Administration provide the Governing Council and the University community with an update on the status of its planned reviews of the University’s *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (1995)* and *Guidelines for Academic Appeals Within Divisions (1977)*.**

#### **4. Graduate Student Case Management**

Last year, 87 individual/groups of graduate students approached my Office for assistance. While this is less than 1% of the University’s graduate student enrolment (.7%), it does represent a 34% increase in my graduate student caseload over the previous year, and the highest number of graduate students who have approached my Office for assistance in the past seven years. I note that while graduate students represented 30% of my student caseload last year, they represented 18% of the total student population, and that the University’s graduate enrolment expansion amounted to a 2.9% increase over the previous year.

The issues most frequently raised by graduate students related to “Policy Interpretation/Advice”, “Academic Concerns”, “Fees/Financial Aid” and “Interpersonal Dispute (eg. Supervision).” I note that in 2002-’03, the issue of “Fees/Financial Aid” was not included amongst the four most frequent topics of concern brought to the attention of my office. I offer a few other comments related to this statistical comparison with 2002-’03 in the following paragraph.

While the frequency of eight of the graduate student issues remained at similar levels to the preceding year, there were notable increases related to the following four issues: “Academic Concerns (eg. Classes/Teaching)” (to 26 cases from 10); “Fees/Financial Aid” (24/9); “Interpersonal Dispute (eg. Supervision)” (20/16); and “Administrative Policy/Procedure (eg. Access/Bureaucracy Issues)” (14/6).

There was also a notable increase with respect to the issue “Policy Interpretation/Advice” (41/27) reflecting my ongoing role in ensuring that visitors are aware of relevant university policy/process and in considering fair implementation as it applies to their situations. The observation I made earlier in this report about our assistance to undergraduates related to this issue (section IV.1), applies to graduate students as well, in terms of their overall increased awareness of relevant policy/procedure by the time they approach our office. This can be attributed both to increased communication by the administration (through academic counseling resources and website information), and

increased consultation initiated by these graduate students with other resources such as their graduate coordinators, departmental chairs, School of Graduate Studies (SGS) associate deans and the Graduate Student Union (GSU). These better-informed students generally present the most complex concerns and situations when they approach us for assistance, frequently involving a combination of the following: more than two issues; more detailed exploration of the fairness aspects of the policy/protocol implementation; fact-finding through contact with multiple university representatives; informal mediation/facilitation, and ongoing involvement sometimes over a period of months.

The complexity of the graduate student caseload also increased considerably from the previous year. We note that 74% (60) of the graduate students raised more than one issue when they approached us for assistance, compared with 68% (42) the previous year, and that 37% (30) raised three or more issues, compared with 21% (13) of the graduate students the previous year. The assistance we provided to 21 (25%) of the graduate students involved three or more “Types of Intervention”. This assistance most frequently reflected a combination of “Individual Consultation” (often involving more than one meeting per individual depending on the complexity of the issues and/or their ongoing nature), together with “Ombuds Contacted Persons/Offices” and “Information/Referral” (the latter often related to policy interpretation/advice).

## **5. Graduate Student Case Resolution**

I commented in section IV.2 that the combination of “expedited” and “resolved” case resolution categories has increased to more recent levels of between 19%-24% of our total caseload, compared with early-to-mid nineties levels of 10%-12%, and that 19% of the undergraduate/professional faculty student cases were categorized as “resolved” last year. Within this context, 28% of the graduate student cases (24) last year were categorized as “expedited” or “resolved” and, more specifically, 17 (20%) of those cases were categorized as “resolved”. In 12 (71%) of these cases, I would categorize the outcome as favourable to the students. With the collaboration of the administration, graduate student issues for which I facilitated a successful outcome included academic appeals and petitions, academic status (continued good academic standing - progress/time-to-degree) and numerous fees/financial aid issues. Regarding many of the graduate students who approached my office with fees/financial aid issues, I would draw the attention of the University community to the apparent policy gap whereby some graduate students’ progress-to-degree extends beyond the University’s guaranteed financial support timeframe, and that although these students remain in good academic standing, they are placed in the financial situation of being unable to complete their programs.

## **6. Recommendations Arising from Graduate Student Caseload**

Appendix G lists a number of different policy/procedural initiatives introduced by the administration over the past several years that have served to address and/or alleviate graduate student issues that I have raised in previous annual reports. At this time, I am bringing forward for the attention of the University community a recommendation from

my previous annual reports that, in my view, has not yet been adequately addressed by the administration in accordance with its “Administration Response” tabled with the Governing Council at the same time as my annual reports.

**(a) Safety in Field Research**

In my last two annual reports, I commented on the University’s *Policy on Safety in Field Research* as it applied to graduate programs in which field research/practicum placement could involve serious health, safety and/or emergency concerns. I referred to the administration’s recruitment of the “Study Abroad Officer” as the lead person in further developing coherent policy and practice regarding undergraduate students’ need for advice, support and safety and emergency considerations when involved in international study and research programs. I recommended that the administration consider a model similar to the Study Abroad Officer for its graduate programs. Last year, the Administration Response stated that: “With the change in leadership and responsibilities in the offices of the Vice-Provost, Students and the Vice-President, Research, some aspects of this consultation have been delayed. A database capable of identifying and locating all students, staff and faculty who are outside the country on University business has been developed, and will be activated this fall. In the next three months, the Vice-Provost, will bring together University offices with responsibilities for graduate students and staff conducting field research. This group will consider methods to extend the safety and emergency services currently being provided...”

I note that since that time the University’s *Health and Safety Policy*, approved by the Governing Council in March 2004, was revised to include reference to the *Policy for Safety in Field Research*. However, the administration’s review of policy/procedure related to graduate student health and safety has not yet been completed. This past August, I met with the Acting Dean, School of Graduate Studies, who confirmed that he would be looking further into this issue during the fall, 2004.

**Recommendation 2: That, for the purposes of its Administration Response to this year’s Annual Report, the Administration provide an update to the Governing Council and University community related to its health and safety policy/procedural framework for graduate students involved in field research/practicum placements.**

**7. Academic Staff Case Management and Resolution**

From 1998 to 2002, the number of academic staff members who approached us for assistance ranged from 8 to 18 individuals each year, representing between 2% and 6% of my annual caseload. Last year, 7 academic staff members consulted our office for assistance, representing 2% of our caseload. These individuals consulted us for input, from a confidential and impartial perspective, related to University policy/procedural information and interpretation (e.g. related to academic or disciplinary misconduct, grading practices, and other student-related concerns), as well as issues related to their Chairs and/or Directors and to program or research funding. In one of these cases, I provided informal mediation/facilitation, and in two cases, I contacted divisional

representatives with respect to resolution of the issues. I believe that some academic staff members who in previous years might have approached our office for information and advice, are now consulting the Office for Teaching Advancement (OTA) and UTSC's Teaching and Learning Services for assistance. Also, the orientation sessions carried out by OTA and Teaching and Learning Services for new and returning academic staff and stipendiary instructors, as well as their website information resources, may well address some of the queries and concerns previously brought to the attention of the Office of the University Ombudsperson.

## **8. Administrative Staff Case Management and Resolution**

The number of administrative staff members who approached us for assistance over the past five years, has varied from 14 to 28 individuals, annually, representing from 5% to 8% of our caseload. Last year, 21 administrative staff members contacted our office regarding their concerns, totalling 6% of our caseload. These individuals requested assistance related to employment and workplace concerns and/or disputes; interpersonal disputes, and or concerns about harassment. We provided them with the opportunity for confidential consultation and, most frequently, we provided options and suggestions, including information and referrals, to help these individuals with the resolution of their own concerns. In four of these cases, we were involved in informal mediation and/or contacting other offices/individuals to facilitate dispute resolution. As I commented in my last two annual reports, I expect that the overall caseload represented by this constituency will remain substantially the same, given the collective agreements in place across the three campuses with respect to their 'step processes' for grievance resolution, and given the "Policies for Confidentials" and "Policies for Professionals/Managers" in place since July 2001 with respect to their dispute resolution processes.

## **V. OTHER ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In addition to initiatives related to graduate and undergraduate students, Appendix G includes initiatives related to administrative and academic staff members introduced by the administration over the past several years serving to address specific recommendations included in my previous annual reports.

However, there remain a few other, more general topics of concern from my past annual reports that I am bringing forward, once again, for the attention of the administration in its preparation of this year's Administration Response.

### **1. Student Housing**

Over the past three years, the number of students who have approached my office with queries and complaints related to residence issues has increased from 3 individuals in 2001/'02 (2% of my student caseload); to 11 individuals in 2002/'03 (5% of my caseload), and to 19 individuals or 7% of my student caseload last year. In January 2003, the Provost formed a twenty-one member Task Force on Student Housing, chaired by the Vice-Provost, Students, with a multifaceted mandate including a review and update of the

University's 1989 *Policy on Student Housing*. The Task Force produced a discussion draft document in February 2004 that included a series of 31 recommendations, and invited community members to provide comments to the Task Force by the end of that month. Recommendation 31 of the Task Force's Report was "that the Vice-President and Provost strike a group to formulate a new *Policy on Student Housing* based on the recommendations of this report."

**Recommendation 3: That, for the purposes of this year's Administration Response to my Annual Report, the Administration provide the Governing Council and the University community with an update regarding the review and approval process for the revised *Policy on Student Housing*.**

## **2. *Guidelines for Appropriate Use of Information Technology***

In response to one of my recommendations in my 2001/'02 Annual Report related to the *Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Information Technology*, The Administration Report stated as follows: "The Academic Advisory Committee has struck a working group to review the guidelines and make suggestions for revisions. Student Affairs, in the Vice-Provost, Students area, will work with this group to ensure the revisions are appropriate within the context of computer use in residences and student use for co-curricular activities. Once AAC has approved the revisions they will be forwarded to CMB for approval and system administrators will be notified. The revised guidelines are expected to be complete within this academic year."

**Recommendation 4: That, for the purposes of this year's Administration Response to my Annual Report, the Administration provide the Governing Council and the University community with an update regarding its review and approval process for the revised *Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Information Technology*.**

## **3. *Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Response***

In response to a recommendation in my 2001/'02 Annual Report, the Administration struck a Task Force on Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Response to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the University's protocols for emergency response and crisis management, and its orientation and training initiatives for key participants. I was advised that the "Coping with Crisis" manual of protocols related to emergency response and crisis management across the three campuses was undergoing substantive revision and expansion, with a proposed publication date of fall 2003. I was also advised that the administration anticipated bringing forward for approval in the 2003/'04 academic year a new draft policy arising from the activities of the Task Force.

**Recommendation 5: That, for the purposes of this year's Administration Response to my Annual Report, the Administration provide the Governing Council and the University community with an update regarding the development of, and approval process for, its new policy related to Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Response.**

#### **4. *Statement of Human Rights and Statement of Institutional Purpose***

The Administration Response to my recommendation in last year's annual report regarding the University's *Statement on Human Rights* (1992) and *Statement of Institutional Purpose* (1992), stated the following: "The Provost's Office agrees that prominent listing of these statements is important. The University Registrar is currently reviewing core listings in all calendars, and will take this recommendation into account. The Statement of Institutional Purpose may be revised by the Governing Council as a result of the academic planning exercise. A new statement would therefore need to be disseminated broadly."

**Recommendation 6: That, for the purposes of this year's Administration Response to my Annual Report, the Administration provide the Governing Council and the University community with an update regarding its possible revision of the University's Statement of Institutional Purpose and its dissemination to the University community.**

## **VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

### **1. Accessibility and Responsiveness**

In my last two annual reports, I have reported operational statistics related to accessibility and responsiveness features of our office, including our initial response time to enquiries; our scheduling of appointments; our time to resolution/closing of cases; the number of students who have identified themselves as part-time; and the method of contact with our office i.e. email, telephone, walk-in, letter (see Appendix D: "Accessibility Measures" and Appendix H: "Case Management: Accessibility & Responsiveness").

With the increased caseload we experienced this past year, our response time to individuals' initial contacts with our office has increased somewhat, as has the time to first appointment. This year, we managed to respond to individuals' initial contacts within the same day or next working day in 81% of the cases, as opposed to 90% in the previous two years. We were able to set up appointments within the same day or next working day in about 34% of those cases in which appointments were required, in comparison with closer to 40% in the previous two years. During all three years, about one-third of our cases involved a wait of 4 working days, or more, for an appointment. However, I note that for all three years, one-half of our cases were closed/resolved within 7 days, and that 80% were closed/resolved within a month. Our success in maintaining these standards of service represents significant effort on our part over the past two years, given the increased caseloads each year, amounting to an overall 26% increase since 2001-'02.

Another measure of our accessibility relates to our availability to part-time students. Last year, we identified as an area of concern the decrease in the number of part-time students who had accessed our services over the previous two years. In 2002-'03, 20 part-time students (1 graduate and 19 undergraduate students), representing 8% of our student

caseload, consulted us about their complaints and queries, whereas 28 part-time students had done so in the previous year (24 undergraduate and 4 graduate students /14% of the student caseload). Last year, 32 part-time students (28 undergraduate and 4 graduate students/11% of our student caseload) approached us for assistance. This represents .5% of the part-time student population in comparison with .2% of the part-time student population in 2002-'03. This is an indication of our successful outreach effort in terms of informing the University community about our availability.

## **2. Consultation and Evaluation**

I have consulted on an individual, or small group basis, with more than fifty representatives of the University over the past year, including amongst others, student government and association representatives, representatives from the Office of the Vice-President and Provost, the Vice-Presidents and Principals of UTM and UTSC, the Equity Officers, offices of student services/affairs, the SGS, members of UTM and UTSC's senior administration, senior staff in other academic divisions, the Office of Teaching Advancement and the Robarts and other libraries. This broad-based consultation has not only served to expand my ad hoc advisory network, but it has also assisted me in achieving early resolution of a number of case-specific issues; in expanding my outreach at the UTM and UTSC campuses, and in following-up on a number of issues raised in my previous annual reports.

For more than a year now, we have distributed evaluation surveys to visitors to our office. These forms are completed on an anonymous basis, and we provide stamped, self-addressed envelopes for their return. The return rate increased last year to 23% from the previous year's 16%. We note that survey comments received, to date, have been very positive in nature.

An additional format of evaluation implemented last year was the Governing Council's review of the Office of the Ombudsperson, and in an earlier section of this report I provide a summary of the Special Committee's report (section II.1 "Mid-Term Review of the Office of the University Ombudsperson").

## **3. Professional Development**

I attended both the mid-year meeting of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) held at Ryerson University in January 2004, and the ACCUO annual meeting hosted by the University of Montreal in May 2004. The focus of both 2-day sessions included individual case studies and role play, the ACCUO Mission Statement and "Standards of Practice", and discussion regarding the following topics: "Ethics and Ombudsmanship", conflict theory, interviewing styles and techniques, and the increased caseloads our offices are experiencing related to individuals with mental health disabilities.

In July 2004, I completed the 3-day ombuds certification program offered by The Ombudsman Association (TOA) in Toronto. The U.S-based TOA's program included

panel presentations and membership discussion related to the essential principles and tools of effective practice including investigation and information-gathering techniques, negotiation skills, “skilled listening and upward feedback”, as well as various case practice exercises.

Last year, I was also recruited to be an external consultant for two projects undertaken by two other academic institutions. In one case, I conducted a workshop attended by academic task force members who were considering an institutional recommendation to establish an ombudsperson’s office and, in the other situation, I conducted an operational review of that institution’s existing ombudsperson’s office. This included the analysis of complainant and respondent service assessments provided by that university’s community members including students, faculty and staff, and which comprised the core component of a more extensive service evaluation program.

This year, in celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsperson at the University of Toronto, I have offered to host the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman’s conference at U of T. I anticipate that this 3-day conference, scheduled for May 2005, will involve about 100 participants from across Canada including legislative ombuds and representatives from their staff, university and college ombuds, corporate/private sector ombuds, health institutional ombuds, and federal government commissioners and representatives from their staff.

The membership of professional ombuds association’s useful exchange of information and expertise continues to provide valuable context for our central mandate of individual complaint resolution. Participation in these professional development opportunities is particularly important given the unique organizational role of an Ombudsperson in terms of impartiality, confidentiality and independence.

## **VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This Report has highlighted a few areas of University policy and procedure where improvement is needed and others where improvement is occurring. I look forward to hearing from the University community with comments or concerns about any of the information and recommendations I have included in this year’s Annual Report.

I would like to express my appreciation to the members of the mid-term review committee on the Office of the Ombudsperson, and to those members of the University community who offered their comments and critique to the committee about the operations of the Office. I found the consultation process and the suggestions put forward by the Special Committee to be very helpful, and we have now implemented the resulting operational changes.

I would also like to express my appreciation to all of the University members whom I have approached for assistance in resolving complaints and problems. The good will, information and advice that so many individuals continue to provide is vital to the accomplishment of the Office’s mandate. In particular, I would like to thank Louis



Charpentier, Secretary to the Governing Council, and my co-worker, Linda Collins, as well as all of the members of my ad hoc consultation network, for their assistance and counsel.

We look forward to continuing our efforts to address problems through early resolution, thorough investigation, and timely recommendations.

Mary Ward,  
October 2004